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FM AMEMBASSY TOKYO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2773
INFO RUEHZN/ENVIRONMENT SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY COLLECTIVE
RUEHME/AMEMBASSY MEXICO CITY 0621
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 5156
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 9138
RUEHFK/AMCONSUL FUKUOKA 3856
RUEHNAG/AMCONSUL NAGOYA 1507
RUEHNH/AMCONSUL NAHA 6193
RUEHOK/AMCONSUL OSAKA KOBE 7658
RUEHKS/AMCONSUL SAPPORO 4393
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 3520
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 4936
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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 TOKYO 001043

DEPT FOR OES/IHB AMBASSADOR LOFTIS
DEPT FOR EAP/J, EAP/EX, CA
USDA PASS TO APHIS, FAS FOR BURDETT
HHS PASS TO CDC
HHS FOR OGHA
DEPT PASS TO AID/GH/HIDN

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

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AMGT, MG, EAGR, JA

SUBJECT: MGSF01 May 7 UPDATE ON JAPAN'S RESPONSE TO H1N1 OUTBREAK

REF: A) TOKYO 965; B) TOKYO 982; C) TOKYO 993; D) TOKYO 1008; E) TOKYO 1024; F) TOKYO 1030

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This Message is Sensitive but Unclassified. Please handle accordingly.

1. (SBU) Summary: No human cases of Type A H1N1 influenza have been confirmed in Japan. All previous reports of suspected H1N1 cases in Japan in the end have tested negative for the novel virus. The Japanese government is preparing for the possibility of the WHO raising its pandemic alert to Phase Six. Nineteen passengers including seven Americans were held overnight after a passenger tested positive for Type A flu on a flight arriving from Detroit at Nagoya May 5. The suspected case later tested negative for the H1N1 virus. On the question of Americans held in quarantine on the suspicion of possible infection with the H1N1 virus, Japanese government officials confirmed the Health Ministry is responsible for notifying the Embassy. Similar procedures are in place for notifying the Embassy of Americans who are held for observation as a precautionary measure pending the test results of a suspected H1N1 case. The Health Ministry's notification procedures were not yet in place at Nagoya airport May 5. The GOJ's health screening procedures have been delaying arriving U.S. passengers by an average of 50 minutes, but can take as long as two hours. Airlines say the GOJ continues to communicate with them on its strict border screening measures, but see opportunities for the GOJ to improve delays with the end of peak travel around the Golden Week holidays. End Summary.

2. (U) As of May 7, 2009 1700 local time, no human cases of the novel Type A H1N1 influenza have been confirmed in Japan.

3. (U) Media reported Chief Cabinet Secretary Kawamura said Japan

may not be able to remain free of H1N1 cases and it should prepare for the WHO to raise the pandemic alert to Phase Six. Health Minister Masuzoe criticized hospitals that refused to admit patients suffering from fever due to H1N1 fears. According to press reports, the Minister added the practice is against Japan's Medical Practitioners Law.

¶4. (SBU) Nineteen passengers, including seven Americans, were held overnight after a passenger tested positive for Type A flu on NWA flight 71 arriving at Nagoya from Detroit May 5. The suspected case was later determined not to be the novel H1N1 virus. The 19 passengers were kept under observation onboard the aircraft and at the airport for six hours before being moved to a nearby hotel for the night. Family members of detained Americans told emboff that Nagoya airport officials allowed passengers to use a GOJ mobile telephone to place short outbound calls. Hotel staff told emboff they had been instructed by the Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare (MHLW) not to forward incoming calls to detainees in their rooms, but rather to relay calls to MHLW. All passengers were released the morning of May 6 after the suspected case was confirmed to be negative for H1N1. (Note: Health Ministry officials told emboffs the GOJ will pay for hotel and food for passengers delayed by such procedures and that a limited number of prepaid mobile phones are available for detained passengers to make short calls. End Note.)

¶5. (SBU) Officials at MHLW told emboffs May 7 that the Ministry should notify the Embassy of an American anywhere in Japan who is either suspected of being infected with the H1N1 virus or held for observation pending further test results of a suspected H1N1 carrier. These procedures were not yet in place at Nagoya airport May 5, according to MHLW officials. Quarantine officers are required to detain passengers seated within two meters of a suspected H1N1 case in a designated facility within or close to the airport until a PCR test is completed on a suspected case, according

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to Health Ministry officials.

¶6. (SBU) Foreign Ministry officials confirmed MHLW is responsible for notifying the appropriate embassy should a foreigner be suspected of being infected with H1N1 flu. However, MHLW will notify embassies about other passengers held for observation only "if they feel it is necessary," according to MOFA officials. United States military health officials on Okinawa said they believe the Naha Quarantine office will uphold a longstanding arrangement to notify Lester Naval Hospital if a SOFA status individual is detained for health screening arriving at Naha International Airport. MOFA informed the Embassy on May 5 when a U.S. service member sitting near a suspect passenger was temporarily segregated at Kansai International Airport. The service member was released after several hours, but missed his connecting flight. The GOJ paid for his hotel expenses.

¶7. (SBU) Officials from U.S. airlines operating in Japan said onboard health checks for arriving U.S. flights typically last between 20 minutes to two hours, with an average delay of 50 minutes. Airline officials said Japan's screening measures are "more aggressive" than in most countries, but added the GOJ communicates well with foreign airlines and, unlike in China, "there have been few surprises." Officials said airport quarantine offices, backed up by medical personnel from Japan's Self Defense Force, were fully staffed to cope with peak travel over Japan's May 2-6 Golden Week holidays. Officials added they would like the GOJ to maintain quarantine officer staffing after the holiday period in order to reduce delays caused by health screening procedures. Airline officials also noted delays in receiving approval from quarantine officials for passengers to disembark, even after all passengers are cleared of flu symptoms.

¶8. (SBU) Embassy is following up with Japanese officials to improve communications with Amcits who may be quarantined and to urge the GOJ to improve their notification, in English, of the possibility travelers may be delayed.

ZUMWALT